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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 004852

SIPDIS

INFO GENEVA USMISSION

STATE PASS AIT/W, GENEVA FOR DAVID HOHMAN

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TAGS: [AMED](#) [CASC](#) [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [PREL](#) [TW](#) [ESTH](#)

SUBJECT: TAIWAN CDC DIRECTOR ON WHO, AVIAN FLU AND PREPAREDNESS

REF: TAIPEI 4764

Classified By: Dir for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

1. (U) Summary: Steve Kuo, Director General of Taiwan,s Center for Disease Control, met with AIT/T on December 1 and discussed aspects of Taiwan,s participation in the WHO, particularly those areas related to infectious disease control, Taiwan,s plans to construct a level 4 research laboratory, and efforts to stockpile Tamiflu. Kuo provided AIT/T a tour of TCDC,s Command Center. End summary.

2. (U) AIT/T Econ Chief and new ESTH officer paid a courtesy call on CDC Director General Steve Kuo at his office on 12/1. Kuo spent over an hour with AIT/T.

WHO Participation

3. (C) We asked if he had any information on Taiwan,s plans to respond to the letter from WHO outlining the guidelines for Taiwan,s participation in the International Health Regulations. Kuo said that Taiwan,s response to the letter would be coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He reiterated Taiwan,s policy that it needs to obtain some form of membership in WHO and that it could not accept the title of &Taiwan, China.8 However, as a practical matter, Kuo said that Taiwan has agencies that could, and do, cooperate with the WHO and confirmed that the WHO treats the TCDC as the focal point in Taiwan for issues regarding infectious diseases. As an example, Kuo said that he and two other specialists from Taiwan attended the November WHO meeting in Geneva discussing Avian Influenza issues.

PARTICIPATING IN GOARN

4. (U) Kuo said that Taiwan has been participating in a WHO mechanism for some time. He cited GOARN (Global Outbreak and Response Network), saying that Taiwan health institutions have been active in GOARN for many years. Taiwan,s participation, he said came about from work done with the USCDC when it established its Field Epidemiology Training Program in Taiwan in 1984. Kuo said activities under GOARN are strictly technical sessions where Taiwan experts interact with experts from other places. Kuo noted that in 2001, Taiwan tried to set up a meeting in Taiwan of GOARN members, but that the PRC had blocked Taiwan,s proposal.

5. (C) When Kuo visited Geneva in November he consulted with some WHO officials. Kuo said that he discussed GOARN and other mechanisms of cooperation with Michael Ryan Director, WHO Office of Epidemic and Pandemic Response. Kuo said that Ryan stuck strictly to technical issues and told Kuo that the ground rules for Taiwan participation in WHO mechanisms and events are that Taiwan is not to introduce any political issues into the discussions.

LEVEL 4 LAB

6. (C) AIT/T noted that we have received information from U.S. firms bidding on contracts to supply services for Taiwan,s tender to build a level 4 ward. Kuo confirmed that Taiwan is in the process of planning to build a level 4 lab, describing it as one of the most sophisticated medical isolation units in the world. Kuo said TCDC had run into negotiation difficulties with Battelle Corporation of Maryland over the bidding for construction of the project. According to Kuo, TCDC originally had budgeted NT\$ 8 billion to build the lab and has divided the project into two phases:

Phase I. A NT\$30 million tender to write the design specifications and request for proposal for the project, but specifically not to include the design of the facility.

Phase II. The remaining funds are for a separate tender for the actual design, construction and equipping of the facility.

17. (C) Kuo said that Battelle,s bid for phase I was NT\$60 million and included design of the structure. Kuo said that at twice the proposed budget, TCDC had no option but to reject this bid. Kuo said he believes that Taiwan cannot move forward on this project without a clear indication that the USG approves of the project. Further, he believes that he must have U.S. firms involved in the construction of the ward to win USG approval. He said that he is prepared to cancel the project if there is no U.S. participation and that he has already started to draft such a recommendation for the Minister of Health. Kuo explained that this project would involve joint research programs with scientists from other countries, particularly the U.S., and that it would be vital to have a facility that meets the most stringent standards. Just prior to meeting with AIT/T, Kuo said that he had received a last minute e-mail from the Trade Representative from the State of Maryland requesting further discussions with Battelle. Kuo said that TCDC is considering its next steps and TCDC confirmed on December 9 that it is still discussing its options.

TAMIFLU & Avian Influenza

18. (U) Taiwan issued a compulsory license to produce Tamiflu on 11/25 in spite of objections by Roche, the Swiss pharmaceutical company (reftel). Under the terms of the license, the Department of Health (DOH) must first exhaust Roche-supplied Tamiflu before distributing locally produced stock. Kuo said TCDC started in 2004 to procure sufficient courses of Tamiflu from Roche to cover 10 percent of the population. He could not guarantee that Taiwan would continue buying from Roche if the needs went beyond 10 percent of the population. He indicated that Taiwan thought it unlikely that Roche would be able to meet all of Taiwan's needs. He added that if a pandemic was evident then Taiwan drug companies would be allowed to make Tamiflu under the terms of the compulsory license. When asked about the 4-5 Taiwan firms that allegedly can produce Tamiflu, Kuo was non-committal, neither confirming the number nor providing names of the firms.

19. (SBU) Kuo said that in the event of an avian influenza pandemic, TCDC,s leadership role is likely to diminish because Taiwan has established a formal plan to move decision making up to the Executive Yuan and the President as any pandemic increases in severity. But he believes that the Taiwan citizenry is well informed about contagious disease outbreaks because of the wide dissemination of information by the authorities during and since the SARS outbreak. He also felt that Taiwan was a leader in terms of preparedness against communicable diseases, particularly regarding Avian flu.

TCDC Command Center

10. At the end of the visit, Kuo provided a brief tour of the Command Center. It is an impressive office with monitors showing real-time images of incoming passengers being screened for fevers and Chiang Kai-shek International airport, data charts showing incidence of Avian Flu and other communicable diseases in foreign countries and in Taiwan. The office was well equipped with phones and computers and could be quickly staffed in the event of an emergency. It was very visiable display of preparation by Taiwan to combat not only AI, but also other communicable diseases and threats to public health. This is in stark contrast with the pre-SARS era arrangements, before AIT and USCDC became heavily engaged in helping Taiwan update its procedures and facilities.

PAAL